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ABSTRACT

This speech articulates one practitioner's assumptions and recommendations concerning desirable preschool education practices and learning environments. It is suggested that reliance on experts such as child development specialists and curriculum planners may limit teachers' access to students as ideosyncratic individuals. Teachers might do better to take the opportunity to build learning activities and provide preschool experiences that are based on personal observation of the interests and abilities of children. It is recommended that, in order to learn about individual children, teachers shcuid provide (1) time to "hang out" with children, (2) a wide range of activities so that children's interests and abilities become apparent, and (3) free choice periods. By supporting each child's explorations, encouraging in-depth involvement in their investigations, and meeting their needs for learning materials and resources, teachers can discard formal curriculums and build an emergent curriculum that is based on familiarity with and observation of each child. There are several ways tc prcvide time for observation by teachers: altering staffing patterns, reorganizing school space, introducing large group play units, and modifying rigid time schedules. An observation-based emergent curriculum can make preschool a place where children become motivated tc be learners and teachers are motivated to teach. (Author/RH)

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TEACHING-LEARNING STYLES: WHO AM I AS A TEACHER? WHO ARE THE CHILDREN I TEACH?

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Once upon a time a rather stuffy educator was visiting Pacific Oaks, and the director of the children's school was showing him around. He was impressed by the physical setting, the equipment and materials, the children's activities, the warmth and enthusiasm of the staff. But at the end of his tour he turned to the director and said doubtfully, "It's very nice. But you don't really teach them anything, do you?"

And she said, "Well, not by the lecture method."

It's my view, like hers, that the lecture method is overrated. People tend to assume that if you've been told something, you know it. Obviously that isn't true. And so this story embarrasses me at the moment because I'm about to try to teach you something, or at least to share some ideas with you, by the lecture method.

When I'm teaching college classes, I don't lecture much. We share experiences a lot, talking to each other. We do some non-verbal things together too. I've gotten very interested in the idea that adults as learners aren't all that different from children as learners. Adults also need to play, to explore materials and ideas and their own experiences. They don't just need to sit still and be told things by people who are supposed to be experts.

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Now, what I'm going to be talking about is the differences

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among people - both children and adults. So, even in this setting in which there's no room to be different in your visible behavior, feel free to be different inside your head. Fortunately, that's a skill all of us learned in school. We learned that you can get away with thinking about anything you like, as long as you keep your body upright and your expression alert. Some teachers try to catch you out at this, calling on you to see if you're really paying attention. I'm not going to do that, so you should feel free.

What I will be doing is to raise some questions, and state some of my particular biases, about adults and children as learners. If this works at all for you, some of these things will set you off on trains of thought of your own. That's fine; that's what's supposed to happen. My sequence of thoughts isn't going to be the same as yours. A lecture is just a stimulus to get you started thinking. You're not expected to pay attention to the whole thing. Let it take you wherever it can; that's what it's for.

Who Are the Children I'm Teaching?

I'm going to start by talking about children and then move on to adults. The first question is, Who are the children I'm teaching?

If you're a teacher, there are two general ways of dealing with this question. The first is to rely on what you are told about children by the experts. The second is to rely on your own observations of children and what you can discover from them. Let's look at each approach in turn.

Being Told. If you choose, are or required, to be told about children, there are two kinds of experts available. The first are the child development theorists. They can tell you, in books and lectures, about ages and stages, about typical behavior for children in the category you're teaching, so you know what to expect - what's normal, and what you should be concerned about, and what some of the effective ways of managing these kinds of behavior may be. The second kind of expert is the developer of curriculum. These people have examined the stages of development in depth, and identified the learnings appropriate to each stage, and taken into account society's expectations for children, and they have designed curricula to meet these needs - curricula which are available for teachers to use.

Now, if you have been told all about child development, and if you have an expert-designed curriculum, then you are freed from having to know at first hand who the children in your classroom are. They are simply four-year-olds, and they need to learn their shapes and colors and things like that, and some may still need to learn to use their indoor voices and to tell him, don't hit him. The curriculum is designed to be teacher-proof; you are responsible only for implementing it, not for inventing it.

This is how most schools beyond pre-school operate. Many pre-schools do too. Publishing companies have made such effective use of experts in designing curricula that they are the primary determiners of curriculum in schools. When elementary teachers in most schools "choose" how to teach reading, the only

choice offered them is which publisher's reading series to use. Not to use a reading series is not usually a choice. In considerable part, this limitation of choice is the direct result of affluence; public schools can afford to buy reading series, so they do. It has been pointed out that teachers in British infant schools, which are less affluent than American schools, have to "make do" a good deal more - and while sometimes the result may be impoverished classroom environments, at other times the result has been teacher creativity and alertness to the possibilities of scrounging.

Preschool teachers in this country are much more likely than elementary teachers to be accomplished scroungers - for obvious reasons. Certainly a good case can be made for better funding for preschools; but if there were any case to be made against it, it might be that it's good for both adults and children to have the experience of "making do" on occasion. It sharpens our wits and keeps us alert to all the educational possibilities in the world other than the elegantly expensive pre-packaged ones. I've been a little sad to see that preschools all over the United States and Canada look remarkably alike; they buy the same stuff from the same places. I don't know if any of you want to argue for higher salaries for teachers and lower materials budgets - but I could be tempted to argue that curriculum planning shouldn't be made too easy for teachers, <u>but</u> that they should be paid well for working at it.

Obviously, my biases are already showing - and that's intentional. I have no wish to present a thoughtfully reasoned view

for you to agree with. I'd rather provoke you to passion, either pro or con, because I think teaching is a passionate enterprise about which people should feel fiercely.

One more observation - as a transition to some thoughts about the alternate way of learning about children, which is to discover. One day I visited my friend Rose's second grade classroom. The teachers in her school had voted to use a particular reading series, which shall here be nameless, and the larger part of her morning was spent organizing children's progress through the three types of activities which made up the reading program. One was small-group oral reading, the second was individual written seat-work to follow up on the oral reading, and the third was probably another variety of written seat-work; I don't remember exactly. Rose spent all her time, in this structure, conducting the three oral reading groups. At the time I was a preschool teacher, and this sort of structure was pretty new to me, and so I asked her what to me was a fairly obvious question, "How do you get to know the children?" She looked surprised. "Well, I go over their written work, " she said. She had a chance to look at each child's <u>products</u> - his work papers - but she didn't really have opportunities to see children as idiosyncratic individuals in other ways, unless they messed up her structure in some way and so she had to interrupt it to deal with them.

<u>Discovering</u>. Given the structure of her classroom, Rose had very little time to discover what her children were like as individuals. There is certainly more tradition in preschool to sup-

port getting to know children individually (whereas in elementary school they're supposed to have gotten all that out of their system and be ready to settle down in the stage of Industry According to Erikson). Nevertheless, pre-packaged curricula have made their way into preschools too, especially in the last ten years.

It was some years earlier when my friend Sandy first started learning about young children, and her introduction to the discovery approach was fairly drastic. In the university program in which she was enrolled, she was sent out to observe children at the very beginning, with no theoretical background and no guidance for what to observe. She was simply told to go sit in the preschool and get to know about children. Which she did; and she became an extraordinary teacher.

My guess is that this approach wouldn't work for all students. Sandy was highly motivated, really interested in children, and she is an insightful and sensitive person. But what she learned, and what I believe all teachers need to learn, is how to pay attention to individuals, to what is really happening for them, and not simply to what is supposed to happen for them.

Three-year-olds, or four-year-olds, or seven-year-olds are not all alike. Obviously. But pre-planned curricula assume that they are - or at least that they should be. And so what happens to the children who don't thrive is that it's their fault. Since the curriculum has been designed by the experts, it's right. Therefore it's the children who are wrong. Of course, we don't generally use the word "wrong" - we use other words instead. We label this child as developmentally delayed, that one as hyper-

active, this one as emotionally handicapped - because once we have given them labels then we can justify doing something different with them. If we're lucky, we can get them out of our classroom altogether; segregation is educators' traditional way of coping with non-thrivers. It's a tradition which is now being seriously challenged by mainstreaming - a movement which parallels the other anti-segregation movements in our society. Desegregation on any basis has critically important benefits for everyone involved in it, but no way does it make life - or teaching - easier. It requires us to deal with people who aren't just like us - people we used to be able to ignore.

When you are dealing with children who aren't thriving, you <u>can</u> go back to the learning-by-being-told approach and study special education and behavior management. Or, again, you can go directly to the children themselves.

The children I'm teaching this year are 6- to 9-year-olds in the primary class at Pacific Oaks. Out of the 32 children some could certainly be labeled "special." One has spina bifida. One is visually handicapped. One was kicked out of public school first grade because he attacked other children with tooth and claw. One showed various perceptual-motor difficulties when he was tested for that sort of thing. One would certainly be placed in a learning-handicapped class if he were in a school which had such classes. There may be others. I had trouble making this list because I don't usually think of these children by labels; I had to stop and make a point of trying to do so.

In our class we get to know the children by interacting with

them and observing them. We listened to the test report on the boy with perceptual-motor difficulties and realized that we already knew most of these things about him, from our own observation, and that he has in fact worked out ways to compensate on his own. He's a fluent reader; he doesn't need to spend his time learning to read. To our delight he has been choosing to spend a lot of time practicing coordination activities: shooting baskets and bowling. This is the same kind of practice he would get in a special therapy class, and he's getting it by his own choice in ours. (For some children we would certainly find our resources less than adequate. For example, our visually handicapped child has a special teacher for an hour a day, provided by the public schools.) But the point I want to make with this example is this: If there are children in our class with special needs, or children who aren't thriving, then it is up to us to get to know those children, to understand their needs, and to change our program to meet their needs. We begin with the assumption that it is the curriculum that is wrong, not the child.

Certainly there is no way we can be all things to all children. There are some children for whom there is no way in which we could change our program and our environment drastically enough to meet their very special needs. Which children's needs can be met in any classroom will depend on its resources. I am not trying to say that any child could thrive in any classroom, if teachers were observant enough and flexible enough.

What I am trying to say is that individual differences are a given, and that the kinds of schools I value most, especially in

preschool, are those which build their programs on this assumption. Many schools do not. Some years ago I worked as a parent aide in my daughter's kindergarten, and I found it a fairly uncongenial place to be, and so I had to try to figure it out. What I realized was that the teacher's goal was to make all the children as like each other as possible. The purpose of her kindergarten was to prepare children for first grade. She said it directly to me, "The children must learn that kindergarten is not nursery school." Nursery school, in her view, is where children get to do what they want to do. In Real School children learn to do what they have to do. Her classroom was the place to begin.

Personally, being something of a rebel, I'm not very comfortable with that goal at any level, and at the preschool level I think it's developmentally inappropriate. Preschoolers need to experience autonomy and learn to exert initiative. If you're a small child, you can do those things only if you have space and time to figure out just who you are, and how you are different from other people, and what you care about. So individual differences need to be a major focus of the preschool curriculum - something for children to learn about, as well as for teachers. As Piaget tells us, preschoolers are egocentric. We can support them in that developmental stage, and we can help them toward a beginning understanding of all the other people in their world, who have wishes and desires too, and who may not be just like me. Being different is OK, and it matters.

Time to review. I've suggested that there are two ways to

learn about children - to be told, and to discover through one's own experience. I don't think all being told is useless; I've been quoting developmental theorists, as you may have noticed. But I think discovering through one's own experience is essential - and I'm also convinced that being told is most useful when it confirms one's own experience - in other words, theory should follow observation rather than precede it. And the main reason I care so strongly that teachers learn about children directly is that otherwise they can fall into the all-too-common trap of believing that curriculum can be efficiently pre-designed and that learners who don't fit into it have something wrong with them.

These are my biases. I hope some of you are fiercely disagreeing with them, and others are passionately agreeing with them, because I am going to go on with them.

Making Space to Find Out about Individuals

My friend Sandy, learning about children by observing them, began as a student with no classroom responsibility; she could just watch. Teachers don't get to behave that way; they have to make the whole place work. So the challenge to you as a teacher, if you happen to be agreeing with me, is to figure out how to structure a classroom in ways that give you time and space to pay real attention to the children you're teaching - as individuals, not just as a group.

To do this, you can't be actively "teaching" every minute. If you are, then you are likely to make generalizations about the group based on a few individuals - either the most cooperative or the most uncooperative, depending on how you feel the activity went. My

friend Kathe talks about having discussions with her fourth grade class, discussions about which she felt very good until another teacher asked her, "How many of the children actually participate?" That question brought Kathe up short; she'd never thought about it. And when she stopped to count, she realized that generally only half a dozen children really talked. "We had a good discussion" really meant that the teacher and Joan and Susan and Robert and Paul and Ellen had a good discussion, and everyone else listened or at least didn't bother.

To get past seeing "them" as a group, you have to be able to observe and interact with individuals. You have to find time to "hang out" with children. You also need to provide a wide variety of activities, to be able to see the wide range of things each child can do and is interested in. Some labeled behaviors, hyperactivity and learning disability, for example, are very much a function of setting. And this is true even for conditions we may think of as more severe. For example, our visually handicapped child came to us from a classroom in which most of the day was spent in sitting-down reading and writing activities, and in which he spent most of his time simply sitting in the back of the room. Now, he can in fact read and write, and he does those things in our class. He also gets his hands in sensory materials of all sorts, he explores the physical environment a great deal, he talks to other people; right now he is picking out the song, "Do Re Mi," on the piano. His limited vision does not interfere overwhelmingly with his learning <u>when</u> his environment has many different things to do in it.

To free adults to observe and interact with individual children, you need to do several things. First, you set up an environment with basic resources clearly available for children to choose among. For young children these include all the familiar things of the preschool: blocks and paint and play dough and wheel toys and climbing equipment. Second, you structure some parts of the day as free-choice times, in which the teacher isn't talking to a group or managing a complex activity every minute. This gives her a chance to notice things - who likes puzzles, who uses the blocks, what friendships are forming, who seems to be having trouble finding something to do.

This structure also enables you to build an emergent curriculum, incorporating the real interests of children in the group. To do this you support individuals' explorations, taking them seriously and encouraging in-depth involvement and investigation. You find yourself going home with a sheaf of notes everyday: Bring book on bears for Brian, magnifying glass for Jenny and Josh; add little cars to the sandbox; brainstorm about ways to involve Sally in activities for longer periods. Curriculum ideas keep emerging as you pay attention.

Are you getting impatient? Am I talking about an unreal world? You have too many children and not enough equipment - all sorts of constraints which make it impossible for you to have this sort of flexibility. Most of us are up against some things like that. But sometimes there are solutions - ways in which some changes can be made. I'd like to look with you at several variables - by definition, things which can vary - which are present in any setting. One or more of these just might provide an opening wedge

for giving yourself more observation time. I'll be talking about four variables: staffing patterns, space use, equipment and materials, and time scheduling.

Staffing Patterns. One of the interesting things in looking at variables is that you may discover that there are options, that not everyone does it the same way you do. For example, I learned to teach in a university lab school and then got a job at Pacific Oaks. Later I was a participating parent in a co-op. In all these programs, the staffing pattern was the same - a team of adults working with a fairly large group of children. Somewhere along the way Liz Prescott and I visited the Little School of Seattle, where some students had begun to earn teaching credentials through a cooperative program with Pacific Oaks - and we discovered that while the school was very similar in philosophy to ours, its staffing patterns were quite different: one teacher worked with each small group of children. It had not occurred to them to do it the other way. Since then, we have seen many day care centers which staff in that way, and it may not have occurred to them that there are alternative possibilities.

Team staffing can make it possible for some member of the team to have free momemts to observe. On the other hand, it also introduces the greater complexity of a larger group of children, and this may or may not be a problem. One of my friends, teaching in toddler day care in which a team of three adults shared responsibility for a group of 12 to 14 children, pretty much came to the conclusion that she would rather have been solely responsible for 4 toddlers in a self-contained space than deal with the complexity introduced by a dozen in a large room. Toddlers, however, are

quite different from four-year-olds; and staffing - team or individual - is one of the important variables to look at.

Space Use. Probably one of the reasons the Little School used its staff as it did was its space. At that time it was located in a church, and the space available was a series of small rooms along a connecting hall. The obvious way to use such space was to assign a separate class to each room, and that's what they did.

Lee Walling has written about visiting a British preschool in which space of this sort was used quite differently. Instead of having a different class, each room had a different function. There was a cozy quiet room, and a cooking/eating room, and a block room, and so on. Adults were assigned to spaces rather than to groups of children. Individual children moved from one room to another by their own choice, just as they might move from one learning center to another in a single large room. There may have been a floater teacher to help direct traffic. Lee was so charmed by this novel arrangement that she went back for a repeat visit; and later she designed the use of space in her day care center, which was located in an old house, along similar lines. In fact, the designation of rooms for different functions rather than for different classes is simply a way of making a center more like a home than like a school. That's how homes are organized.

Equipment and Materials. Both staffing and space use have an effect on the time flexibility available to teachers. So do the equipment and materials which are present in the center. In our studies of day care (the report most relevant to what I'm talking about now is Planning Environments for Young Children)

we found that we could make some pretty clear predictions about the power of different kinds of equipment to hold children's interest. One of the most useful distinctions we made was that between simple play units, complex units, and super units.

A simple unit has one use; it generates one kind of play. Examples of simple units include climbers, tricycles, puzzles. Complex units have sub-parts or other features which encourage manipulation and improvisation; examples include art activities, a play house with supplies, a sand box with shovels. A super unit has three or more kinds of parts to manipulate. Examples are a sand box with shovels and water, a climber with moveable boards and hoses and firemen's hats, a painting activity with collage materials also available.

Trying to assess the amount to do per child, in a day care center, we counted play units. However, we figured on the basis of our observations that a simple unit usually accommodates one child, a complex unit four, and a super unit eight. Translate this into the play potential of a space for children, and it means that you have to have eight simple units to hold the attention of as many children as one super unit will. The more play units you have, and the more able they are to hold children's attention, the more flexibility you as a teacher have in your own behavior. Where there isn't enough to do per child, you will spend most of your time helping children find something to do. And so your equipment and the ways in which it is combined have a lot to do with how you can choose to spend your time.

Time Scheduling. Finally, there is time scheduling itself. Time in preschool programs is scheduled in a wide variety of ways.

In some programs adults spend a large portion of their time in teacher-directed group activities - "teaching" in the sense of talking to a group of children and closely guiding their behavior. In other programs a much larger part of the day is scheduled for free-choice activities, in which children are doing a variety of things simultaneously and the teacher helps and intervenes in assorted ways. Competent teachers with high energy can often get satisfaction out of the alternation of teacher-directed activities with periods of free play - rather like class and recess. Some teachers ignore the children as much as possible during the free play intervals, but others are able to use this time for the sort of observation I've been talking about. For other teachers, a free-choice structure provides a more relaxed and congenial rhythm for giving this kind of attention to children.

Besides activity times, nearly all programs have some time designated for routines - snacks and meals, bathroom times, rest times. Where space permits, there may be a choice in how these are handled and what demands are thus made on the teacher. For example, in some programs all children are supposed to go to the bathroom and wash their hands at the same time, an arrangement which places heavy management demands on teachers. On the other hand, in a center in which we observed, children were sent to the bathroom two or three at a time, over a twenty-minute period. Those inclined to engage in water play in the sink had some time for it; individual tempos were allowed for, and only occasional teacher intervention was needed. Sometimes, of course, space design makes this flexibility impossible; but I have also seen

the intentions of the designers flagrantly ignored. My own children went to kindergarten in a room which had its own bathroom. Nevertheless, twice during the morning the teacher lined all the children up and walked them around the corner of the building to the primary bathroom. I never figured out why.

I'm about to move on from looking at children to looking at adults - teachers as people. To summarize, I've been suggesting that you can learn about children through being told about them by experts, or through becoming an expert observer yourself. You can rely on expert-designed curriculum or you can design your own in an emergent process, taking children's interests seriously and following up on them. In my biased view, you are more likely to meet the needs of any group of diverse children if you keep your program open to change, based on your continuing observations. To find time to observe and interact with individual children, you need to experiment with staffing patterns, space use, equipment and materials, and time scheduling.

Who Am I As a Teacher?

Having said all this, I want to stop and ask you a personal question which I probably should have asked at the beginning: How much of the time do you think children should get to do what they want to do? In other words, do you think children are capable of making decisions about what they need to do in order to grow and learn, or do adults need to make those decisions for them?

And there are several related, still more personal questions: How much of the time, in your life, do <u>you</u> get to do what you want to do? Do you get to do what you want to do as much as you'd <u>like</u> to? As much as you think you <u>ought</u> to?

These are moral questions; they have to do with your view of the world. My daughter's kindergarten teacher, whom I mentioned earlier, was clear in her conviction that school is where you learn to do what you have to do. However, she did have a different view of what preschool is like. So do I. I think preschool should be, above all, a place where children get motivated to be learners. Adults in preschool need to make it clear to children that learning is exciting, learning is safe, and learning is possible.

I don't think adults can do this for children unless their personal experience includes encounter with learning - and with the risks that new learning entails - as exciting, safe, and possible for them. Look hard at your own experience. Does this describe you?

I am personally most comfortable with the sort of program in which children choose many of their own activities - in which they behave as self-directed learners. I think that's how children get motivated to continue being learners. And I have come to believe that the same principle applies to adults. I think that adults work best and hardest when they're doing what they want to do. I don't think we can be there for kids unless we're there for ourselves. That applies to the daily routine as well as to the choice of a profession and a job. And so I want to ask: Do the staffing pattern, the use of space, the equipment and materials, and the time scheduling in the program you work in reflect the personal styles and preferences of the people who work in it? Do you get to work at a pace that fits your energy level? Do you get to do things that renew you, that give you pleasure, that give you a chance to learn through play?

Let me give some examples. In the primary class in which I work we have an indoor/outdoor program and an average of four adults present. We need people to take responsibility for academics - reading and math, for the outdoor environment and physical activities, for art and construction activities. We divide up these responsibilities by asking people - all of us - what they'd like to do - what they enjoy, what they're good at, what they want to learn. Last semester Barbara, a new student, wanted to work on art and construction and the outdoor environment, so she did, with marvelous results. Kim, who is a second-year teaching fellow, worked mostly in reading last year; this year she wanted to learn more about math. Obviously, if we all wanted to do the same thing, we'd have to do some compromising. But that hasn't happened; most of us have several possible choices, and we sort ourselves out.

We have been interested to find that our views of how the day went for children depend a lot on what we've been doing. In our egocentric ways, we see it as a good day if it enabled us to do what we wanted to do; and that's different for different people.

An aside: In my college classes we often have potluck suppers, and when I first started having them I took a lot of anxious responsibility for organizing them. Now I just ask everyone to bring food, and it nearly always works out. If it didn't, then I'd organize - but increasingly I've learned to begin by trusting people's good sense.

I've written, in Dimensions of Teaching-Learning Environments: Focus on Day Care, about a day care center which made its program

more workable by giving staff members more choices. This center used to have separate groups of children, each with its own teacher and with everyone duplicating each other's efforts. When its staff decided to try functional space use, with different areas for different activities, then they were also in a position to try differentiated staffing, giving the quite diverse members of the staff a chance to choose what each most liked to do. Sally wanted to be outside as much as possible. Mayella preferred to be as sedentary as possible, to avoid large muscle activities. Jan wanted to "teach" children, to do a school-type program. All these preferences met the particular needs of some of the children; and so these adults found themselves feeling more competent and enthusiastic, because they were able to spend the majority of their time doing the things they liked to best and getting direct reinforcement from children. Liz Prescott has spoken of this approach as "reinforcing people's own wishes and desires," in contrast to the more common behavioral approach of reinforcing what someone else has decided people ought to do. In terms of motivation, of morale, and of meeting the diverse needs of a group of adults and children, it's worth thinking about.

You can't do this kind of flexible group decision-making very well unless you care about and trust the people you work with. There are two parts to this caring and trust. One is respecting each other's competence as workers. The other is caring about each other as persons, becoming friends who enjoy being together and can take the risks involved in sharing new ideas and trying new things. You need to be able to count on the sort of support

which isn't based just on your being competent, it's based on your being you.

As an individual, you can make a point of building friendships. It won't always happen, but it's usually worth trying. Being friends means, for me, that at some time we've gone somewhere together or talked about personal stuff together or helped each other in some sort of crisis. We have a sense of each other as persons apart from work.

As a staff group, you can also make time for building friendships. You make a point of having some meetings where you eat and laugh and enjoy each other. You have some meetings where you share personal experiences and ideas about issues that matter to adults: How do you learn? How did you feel about school when you were a kid? What does it mean to you to be a woman, or a man? Do you feel oppressed? By whom or by what? Do you know who you are and what you believe about being in the world? Can you relate that to what you're doing with children?

If I may oversimplify a bit, there are two views of being in the world. One is that the world is a grim place and that success and satisfaction can come only from learning to do your duty - from doing what you don't want to do. This may also imply that you need to learn to fight your oppressors well, so that eventually you might get your turn to be on top. In this view, children will not work at learning unless they are made to, beginning as early in life as possible.

The other view is that life is frequently worth living, even exciting. Your task in life is to figure out responsible ways of

getting to do what you want to do, while trying to see others' points of view as well as your own. In this view, education should give people a chance to find out what they really care about, and the competence to do something about it.

Neither view is "right." Each is partly true, and each carries its own risks. I have a personal preference for the second, and I also believe we haven't tried it enough in education. In addition, I think it offers adults more opportunity to offer children highly motivating models of what growing up can be like.

Life is a serious matter. So is education. But education can take itself too seriously. We need a saving sense of humor, and we need to enjoy each other. We especially need to enjoy our differences, instead of trying to make everyone like everyone else.

That's risky. If what you're supposed to do on your job is teach children to conform, you may get in trouble for doing otherwise. In children's literature my favorite risk-taker is the Elephant's Child. He is the hero of one of Kipling's Just So Stories, and he did get in trouble. When he was born, back at the beginning of the world, elephants didn't have trunks. He had only a blackish, bulgy nose, about as big as a boot, that he could wiggle about, but he couldn't pickt things up with it. And he was full of insatiable curiosity, which means that he asked ever so many questions. All his relatives spanked him when he asked questions, because they knew his curiosity might get him in trouble.

Fortunately there were in the neighborhood a couple of grown-ups who weren't his relatives - a bird and a snake - and

they thought asking questions was OK. One day, when he asked a new fine question, "What does the crocodile have for dinner?" Kolokolo Bird told him to go to the river and find out. When he asked his relatives, they spanked him, of course, but armed with the bird's encouragement, he went anyway.

It was indeed a risky business. He met the crocodile on the banks of the river and asked him his question, and the crocodile said, "Come hither, little one, and I'll whisper." So the Elephant's Child did, and the crocodile caught the Elephant's Child by his little nose and said, speaking through his teeth like this, "I think today I shall begin with Elephant's Child." At this the Elephant's Child was much annoyed, and he said, speaking through his teeth, like this, "Led go. You are hurtig be." He wouldn't have gotten out of this predicament without help from another grownup, the Bi-Coloured Python Rock Snake, who helped him pull against the crocodile. Fortunately they pulled hardest, and at last the crocodile let go with a plop you could hear all up and down the Limpopo.

What had happened during this scary and painful process was that the crocodile had pulled his little nose out into a really truly trunk, same as all elephants have today. He didn't realize how useful that would be until that helpful and informative grown-up, the snake, helped him to discover how he could use it to pick up food, to swat flies, to sing through - and to spank people with. And so he went home and spanked all his dear relatives for a long time, until they were very warm and greatly astonished. And they too went off to borrow new noses from the crocodile, and when they came back no one spanked anybody any more.

All of us, as grownups and teachers, get to choose whether to be spankers - nay-sayers - or whether we are willing to help children take the risks they choose to take. I'd like to challenge you to support adventurous learning, to encourage children to feel good about themselves and about being different from each other as well as like each other. Standing up for nonconformists like the Elephant's Child is risky; we may even get spanked sometimes. But I think we need to keep trying, adults and children together, to change our world to provide a greater variety of living and learning spaces for all of us, whoever we are.

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